

about these global financial transactions and associations. It is perfectly legitimate to ask how they could impact the Biden administration's foreign policy. That is especially true as it relates to China, given the extensive links between the Biden family and that country. Let's see if anyone dares to ask questions at the President's first news conference.

NATIONAL SECURITY

Mr. President, on another subject, I want to discuss the national security threats facing our country.

A recent poll showed 45 percent of Americans acknowledge that China is the greatest threat to the United States. A year ago, that percentage was half that number thinking that China was a threat, the greatest threat to the United States.

Frankly, this year, no other nation came close to what they think about China being a threat—not Russia, not North Korea, not Iran. These were all far behind.

Half of Americans believe China is the world's leading economic power. A record 63 percent say that the economic power of China is a critical threat to the United States.

Now, we all know the American people are smart. They are perceiving exactly what is happening with the United States vis-a-vis China or China vis-a-vis the rest of the world. China wants to supplant our country as the greatest nation and the greatest economy in the world, and China will do it if we are blind to that danger.

Everywhere I see the threat of China's rise minimized. On Tuesday, I saw a very curious thing in the declassified "Intelligence Community Assessment of Foreign Threats to the 2020 U.S. Elections." The intelligence community determined that China did not engage in pervasive election meddling but noted that was in part because China saw the risk associated with doing so.

The intelligence community determined that China would not be excited if President Trump had won the 2020 election because he would "challenge China's rise."

The National Intelligence Officer for Cyber Issues, in particular, found that the Government of China wanted former President Trump to be defeated in the general election, preferring "the election of a more predictable member of the establishment instead." And "China took at least some steps to undermine former President Trump's reelection chances, primarily through social media and official public statements and media."

Yet some in the news media read this very same report that I read and declared triumphantly and falsely that there was nothing to fear from China in terms of influencing our elections. It is pretty clear why China would not want a President unafraid to assert American national interests. That means demanding reciprocal trade, secure borders, and a defense policy focused on American national interests.

We all know that China has been playing us for suckers. China continues to try to expand its influence globally, including in international bodies like the World Bank and the World Health Organization. It doesn't seek to play by the rules but to exploit its influence for its own advantage at the expense of the United States and probably any free country because they don't like democracy.

In this same assessment I saw that Iran, another enemy, also wanted to defeat a strong American President and sow division. Many others—Lebanese Hezbollah, the Government of Cuba, and the Maduro Government of Venezuela—they all had the very same idea. They all wanted to defeat President Trump. Only Russia seems to have preferred Trump but just according to that assessment—although I remember reading a year ago during the primaries that Senator BERNIE SANDERS was also a favorite of Russia. He had to have a defensive briefing, meaning Senator SANDERS, because Russia wanted to help his campaign.

Also, remember, it was then-Vice President Biden who first announced the naive and disastrous Obama "reset" appeasement policy toward Russia. This, coming in the wake of Russia's invasion of our ally, Georgia, arguably gave Putin the idea that he could get away with invading Crimea and Ukraine.

Let's also take this moment to recall that when the Obama Justice Department and the FBI saw threats from Russia during the 2016 election, they didn't do what they did for SANDERS. They didn't defensively brief Trump and his team. Instead, do you know where they went? They opened Cross-fire Hurricane and outrageously used briefings to Trump and his associates as intelligence gathering operations, ultimately wasting years of taxpayer money and time.

Abraham Lincoln once said:

America will never be destroyed from the outside. If we lose our freedoms it will be because we have destroyed ourselves from within.

In fact, the goal of what the KGB calls "active measures," like disinformation since Soviet times, has been to pit Americans against each other to cause us to destroy ourselves.

That brings me to another related point. As I see this seat of democracy fortified with walls and barbed wire while the people, the citizens, and the taxpayers are kept out, I can't help but think about where we will go from here.

Yet the Democrats can only speak of destroying the filibuster during these difficult times. When I hear talk of destroying the filibuster—the very tools that force bipartisanship and ensure that those representing all Americans are heard and that America act as one being abolished forever—I am worried. If the slimmest of majorities is about to impose its will on the other half of the country from inside an armed

bunker, the Russians will have achieved their ultimate goal.

We are not our own enemies to be silenced and to be fenced in. We are one Nation, but we must pull together and acknowledge what it means when countries like China and Iran, our enemies and our adversaries, don't want us to put our country's interest first.

FREE SPEECH

Mr. President, then, on my last point, I want to bring up another few remarks on the First Amendment, as I have spoken a couple of times before very recently.

I have come to the floor over the last few weeks to talk about the First Amendment, one of America's most cherished pillars of freedom. Unfortunately, in recent years, we have seen a corrosive culture undermining sacred civic freedoms Americans risk taking for granted. Too often we don't think about the freedoms we have because we were born here.

We can learn a lot from immigrants that come to this country and appreciate Americans for our freedoms. Whenever I go to these citizenship ceremonies we have for immigrants, I always tell them: I wish you would tell—when you hear some American complaining about what is wrong with America, I hope you know from your experience in other lands that you came here for freedom. Remind us of how lucky we are to have what we were born into.

Silencing the free exchange of ideas has infiltrated college campuses and even the American workplace. It has even affected journalism, traditional media, and all across our social media platforms. We all know that not all speech is protected by the First Amendment and, occasionally, we in the United States fall into a discussion about the technical boundaries of the First Amendment when we talk about the meaning and the merits of free speech.

Now, the health of our democracy depends on free speech to foster an informed public, something that I think Thomas Jefferson made very clear. If democracy is going to work, it is going to have to work with an educated public. The rigorous exchange of ideas inform debate on issues affecting our lives and enables individuals to challenge power and also to challenge orthodoxy.

In theory, the institutions of the "fourth estate" should be the staunchest defenders of the First Amendment. I think I said it before, but you can't say it too often—and there is probably a 100 different ways you can say it—but I always like to say that journalists are the police of our constitutional system to make sure that everybody and all follow the rule of law. What they bring to the people of this country about how our government functions makes everything very transparent, and when things are transparent, you have accountability.

So as I think about these things, it has been baffling to watch over the last

year as some editors and executives, even at storied institutions, crumble under pressure to police speech, to conform to orthodoxy, and to stifle the exchange of ideas instead of what they should be doing, promoting the contest of these ideas—in other words, speech, orthodoxy, and exchange of ideas—when they are under attack.

It is now old news, but, last summer, a long-time opinion editor of the New York Times was pushed out of his position. For what? For having the audacity to publish an opinion piece written by Senator TOM COTTON. Apparently, a group of readers and employees found Senator COTTON's ideas so upsetting as to warrant the removal of the editor who had the guts to publish them. The paper also issued a several-hundred-word editor's note even expressing regret for publishing the piece in the first place.

If those readers and employees at the Times disagreed so strongly, the public could have learned something by publishing a counter-argument instead of reading about their regret. I, myself, have publicly disagreed with Senator COTTON about a policy idea or two, and I make my points here on the Senate floor. I don't ask for Senator COTTON's resignation, like they had to expunge his or give all sorts of excuses why they published that and they shouldn't have published it.

Instead, what do we have? We had executives at a paper of record scapegoat a colleague for failing to confirm to some yet unexplained orthodoxy versus a rational decision to engage in public debate on their pages.

In January, POLITICO invited a slate of individuals to guest-edit their widely read newsletter, "Playbook." Among those guest editors was Ben Shapiro, a conservative commentator. His name alone was enough to spark a backlash among staffers and even outside commentators. To their credit, the editors of POLITICO did not apologize.

But according to the Washington Post media writer, some POLITICO employees who privately supported the choice to publish Shapiro were "afraid" to speak up on staff calls, fearing backlash among colleagues.

Now, that is only two episodes I give you, but these episodes represent a very unhealthy environment where too many think it is prudent to give voice to those with whom they agree or whose views are deemed acceptable.

While the editors did the right thing at one outlet, they didn't at the other. Either way, it probably means that they will be more selective about what is acceptable—what is acceptable—in the future as we do the businesses of our newspapers.

Now, when you worry about what is acceptable, it certainly doesn't serve those principles that I mentioned earlier that ought to be encouraging dialogue, dispute, learning from each other, and educating each other. Now, these may be fairly obscure controversies I just gave you, but they are indicative of a yet wider problem.

Expectations of acceptability and a preference for unchallenged ideas—this all chips away at the most sacred civic freedoms in America. No one learns more by less debate. Neglecting to defend free speech and champion the free exchange of ideas creates a pathway for censorship. Democracy doesn't thrive on censorship.

The institutions of the news media ought to defend the fundamental principles behind free speech and free press at the top of their lungs. The First Amendment is the oxygen of their own existence.

If they were doing their work, there shouldn't have to be a single Senator here in the U.S. Senate giving speeches about why they don't want more free speech and why they want less free speech.

Last fall, the New York Post had a story censored on Twitter a short time before the election. Regardless of what one thinks about the content of that story, the methods of reporting, or even the tone of the writing, the suppression of information like that should alarm both news writers and news consumers. They ought to be more a protector of freedom of speech and freedom of press than a Senator here on the U.S. Senate talking about it.

Many outlets went to work fact-checking or reporting on the topic in their own way. That is all well and good. It is their job. But the public conversation about the censorship devolved into a question of whether Twitter had the legal ability to do what it did instead of a discussion of whether it was the right thing to do, because it wasn't right. Even Twitter's CEO sees that now.

However, there were no fiery defenses of free speech and free press from the mainstream outlets, and those mainstream outlets ought to be the ones talking more about freedom of speech and freedom of press than having Senators on the floor of the U.S. Senate bring it up and say: Why aren't you doing your job? Why aren't you practicing your profession as it ought to be? Why aren't you being the policemen of the system the way you ought to be?

Not even media with caveats were reporting about that Twitter event that I just spoke about. This was a perfect opportunity for journalistic institutions to weigh in, and they should have weighed in. They have a dog in the fight. It should be the bread-and-butter issues for every editorial board across the country—not just the editorial board but the reporters. The lack of this kind of pro-free press and pro-free speech advocacy also contributes to the unhealthy environment that shuns debate and silences dissent.

So what will be the consequences of a media environment where conformity and comfort take precedent over the free exchange of ideas? The first and most obvious is a less rigorous and less informed public discourse and the citi-

zens less informed. Opinions and preferences, especially on matters of public interest, are always improved after being challenged.

If you disagree with the New York Times' editorial board or a pundit for FOX News, that is fine.

It would be better if the public heard all about it. Broader discussions mean broader understanding. Without a broad, vigorous public debate, we lose empathy that results from engaging with somebody else's ideas.

In these divisive times in society, empathy is in low supply. The last thing that we lose in a media environment ruled by compliance and conformity is the grand American tradition of dissent.

Free speech and free press have centuries-long history in America, from Thomas Paine's pamphlets to the tweets spreading across the land this very minute, the revolutionary contest of ideas might take a different shape but remain critical to our civic culture and the continued growth of our Nation and the strengthening of our democracy.

I hope more institutions in the "fourth estate" will take an aggressive approach advocating free speech.

Now, I wasn't around when Thomas Paine published "Common Sense," but history and my own experience teaches me two important lessons: The free exchange of ideas strengthens representative government and will, then, help preserve our democratic Republic for generations to come. And that is what this generation should be all about, making it better for the next generation, both from the standpoint of the economy but also for an understanding of our democratic institutions.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate consider the following nominations en bloc: Calendar No. 28 and Calendar No. 36; that the Senate vote on the nominations en bloc without intervening action or debate; that the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate; that any statements related to the nominations be printed in the Record; and that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will report the nominations en bloc.